

THE ALTON MESSENGER

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CITY OF ALTON

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER 2006



Alton City Commission

Salvador Vela
Mayor

Arturo Galvan
Mayor Pro-Tem

Ricardo Garza
Commissioner

Oscar Tovar
Commissioner

Dr. José Picasso, D.C.
Commissioner

Hilario Rincones
City Manager

WHAT'S INSIDE?

- City Christmas Parade
- *Que Bonito Alton*
- Experienced Bikes
- Business Loans
- Department Spotlight
- Business Conference

Write us or drop by City Hall
with your submissions or
ideas for the next issue!

A Message from the Mayor



During this time of the year we begin to more closely assess what we have accomplished and what we have in store for the future. I can only tell you that we have been blessed in many ways and the community continues to prosper. These prosperous times have come about because of the collective effort of volunteers who give their time to the community on a daily basis and our dedicated municipal staff who make every effort to keep up with the growth that is occurring in our city.

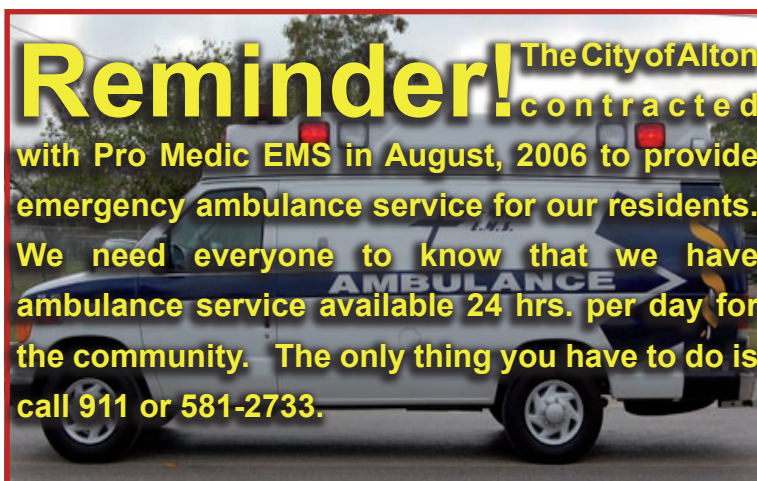
This month will be an exciting moment in our community's short history. The construction of our new municipal building (city hall) will begin. This project will be the largest publicly financed

project the City has undertaken and I know everyone will be very proud of our municipal building once it is completed.

I want to personally thank all those organizations that took on the community service project component of our Bike Project. During the Christmas season it was very gratifying to see many in our community give their time to instill in our children the values of caring, sharing, helping and giving.

Through an initiative led by our City Manager, staff and volunteers, over 600 children in Alton received an "experienced" bicycle in excellent shape. Through the efforts of over 15 organizations and adult volunteers, youth in our community were involved in a community service initiative and received this bike as a gift. Even though receiving a bicycle was a memorable and wonderful holiday present, the real gifts were the lessons and examples shared with our youth and realizing that our community will benefit from this collective act of sharing. Wishing you a prosperous New Year, and thank you Lord for your favor and blessing over our great City of Alton.

Salvador Vela, Mayor of Alton



Reminder! The City of Alton contracted with Pro Medic EMS in August, 2006 to provide emergency ambulance service for our residents. We need everyone to know that we have ambulance service available 24 hrs. per day for the community. The only thing you have to do is call 911 or 581-2733.

Amnesty! For two weeks, from Monday Feb. 19th through Friday Mar. 2nd 2007, the Alton Municipal Court will be holding an Amnesty Program. Anyone with an outstanding warrant can call Court Clerk, Sonia Gonzalez, at 581-2733 to make arrangements to pay traffic tickets without penalty.

CHRISTMAS PARADE 2006

by the City of Alton and the Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce

The City of Alton and the Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce collaborated to offer the community (and especially the children) the first ever Christmas parade in the City of Alton.

Part of this special day included Santa Claus making an early delivery over at Alton to hand out gifts to every child who attended the event. It was quite a joyous occasion as children received their gifts and also their bicycles as part of the "Experienced Bikes" project. To top it off, the air was filled with the smell of tamales and hot dogs available for the entire family courtesy of two Chamber members Calixto Hernandez and Felipe Gomez.



The parade was held at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, December 16th, 2006. Many business leaders and residents came forward to volunteer their resources and time to demonstrate to our children our sense of civic pride- as well as to have a fun-filled day with the family. The parade ran west of Cantu Elementary and led all the way to the Alton Recreation Center on Dawes Street. We asked all our local churches, non-profit organizations, businesses, youth clubs, high school bands, car clubs, trail riders and motorcycle clubs to join in the fun. The turnout was overwhelmingly positive.

A carnival was held in conjunction with these events from Thursday, December 14th - Sunday, December 17th on Dawes Street and Alton Boulevard (Conway). It was a tremendous amount of fun as you can see from the photos. On Page 6 you will find a more extensive list of the community members we'd like to thank, but we will begin by thanking the City of Alton Director of Special programs, Rosie Tello, and Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce Members, Marina Treviño, Monica Freeman and Elena Cardona, for coordinating the parade participants and volunteers.





“Experienced bikes” Project

The City donated 800 bicycles as part of a community building initiative called the “Experienced Bikes” project. The goals of this initiative were four-fold and were to:

1. Facilitate and support physical activity among our youth.
2. Create the opportunity for youth to learn the value of service via community projects.
3. Teach youth the wonderful meaning of Christmas by doing good deeds for others.
4. Work in conjunction with local partners to develop and sustain the initiative for greater community impact.

The bicycles, previously owned by university students, are in good shape. Those that needed minor repairs were fixed by volunteers who engaged in several bicycle repair clinics organized by City staff.

The City, with nineteen local partners, coordinated the community service activities and supervised the children. Local partners included: Texas A&M University - Colonias Program & IHOS Project, La Union de Pueblo Entero, Cantu and Salinas Elementaries, twelve local Churches, Newcomer Academy, Alton Youth Club and the Lions Club.

Those who received a bicycle completed a community service activity and participated in the Parade.





Que Bonito Alton

In a year from now, imagine overhearing families as they gather for Holiday dinner noticing a cleaner and more beautiful Alton. The residents of Alton, taken aback by the comment, realize, “*Que Bonito Alton.*”

Through this community beautification project, we ask you, lot owners, to be our partner in making that a reality.

Earlier this year the city initiated a clean up project whereby residents were given the opportunity to clean out their homes of all types of junk, old furniture, odds and ends and even tires. This clean-up campaign went very well.

We need you, the citizens of Alton, to continue to help us form a partnership to clean up our neighborhoods, yards, alleys, streets, and curbs. Can you imagine what our fair city would look like with a little effort?

The City of Alton is committed to making our city a better place to live for our children, families, and friends. Additionally, the City will ask for citizens to mow grass and weeds on their properties while the City staff is in your neighborhood cleaning the area.

This coming year we will be planning two more clean up campaigns, one in early spring and one in early fall. Finally, we will promote the events in advance so that you can also plan on cleaning your residence and getting rid of those items in and around your home.

On the right side of this page, we will outline the strategies and list the responsible parties for coordinating with you this ambitious cleanup effort.

How do we get to *Que Bonito Alton*?

Brush Pickup - Our city council and the administration are working to include brush pick-up once per month as part of the new trash collection contract to begin May 2007. We are making efforts to clean up all the alleys we need your help in maintaining them clear of trash and brush.

Weedy Lots - Within the next 10 days we will be “attacking” each weedy lot in our community. Yes, every weedy lot! We will first inform the property owner, in writing, if they have been identified as owning a weedy lot. If the owner does not respond in ten days, the City will go on the property, mow the lot, and charge the costs of mowing against owner and fix a lien on the property for the cost of mowing the lot. Please call Albert Maldonado at City Hall – 581-2733 – to report a weedy lot on your street.

Potholes - To address the need for pothole repairs after last fall’s rainy season, the City subcontracted repairs on areas of high priority leaving the staff to repair other areas with *caliche*. These repairs continue to hold up, however, we are looking for a long-term solution. The City is in the process of purchasing equipment to do all repairs with asphalt. Help us identify potholes by calling 581-2733 and informing Steve Peña.

Graffiti - The most challenging aspect of our beautification is a solution to the graffiti that reminds us to be vigilant and responsible for the City’s appearance. Please realize that we cannot succeed in eradicating the problem without our coordinated efforts to hold each other accountable and aware of these infractions. The best solution is prevention, so please report to the police any individuals you see committing these acts. The City has also acquired special equipment to wash out graffiti or paint it over.

Demolitions - The City will become more aggressive in demanding owners of dilapidated buildings to demolish these public health risks that make the city look blighted and unclean. We are going to act on your calls to do something about these buildings. Please keep in mind the City has to follow certain condemnation protocol and would prefer the owners demolish these buildings on their own. We will not wait forever, so if you or someone you know owns property that is abandoned or has structures needing to be demolished, know that something will be done to remove that structure.

Continued on Page 6

Loans for Your Business

The Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce and the University of Texas Pan American Small Business Development Center sponsored a one-day conference on November 14th, 2006 with an emphasis in assisting businesses of Alton and the surrounding areas to learn about a loan program available through the U. S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

Staff members of the SBA promoted their pilot Community Express loan guarantee program. The program was developed in collaboration with the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) and its member organizations. Under the pilot, which is available to select lenders, an SBA Express-like program is offered to pre-designated, geographic areas serving mostly Low and Moderate Income areas and New Markets small businesses.

The program also includes technical and management assistance, which is designed to help increase the loan applicants' chances of success. Under the program, Business Loan Center, also known as Business Loan Express (BLX) and Florida-based, SBA Community Express lender, offers unsecured loans up to \$50,000. UTPA/SBDC is a technical assistance provider for BLX, which is SBA's number one lender in South Texas.

Department Spotlight

Jose Vela, Police Chief

How long have you been working with the City of Alton?

I started working for the City of Alton on May 27th of 1997; I am going on ten years as of May 2007.

What type of experience and preparation do you bring to this job?

I have a total of 14 years experience in Law Enforcement. I started as a criminal investigator and I am now the police chief for the City of Alton.

How many people are currently employed in the Police Department?

The Department currently has five communications dispatchers, one lieutenant, two criminal investigators, one warrant officer and five patrolmen.

Continued on Page 6



The Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce: *Moving Forward*

On September 30, 2006, the Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce held their first-ever Business Conference. Through the sponsorships of many businesses and volunteer speakers, the conference was a success.

This free event brought together approximately 130 participants at the Alton Recreation Center. Topics discussed included: lending, legal issues, marketing, and developing business plans. Watch for future events and meetings!

City Manager's Note

by Hilario Rincones

I would like to begin by thanking all the volunteers who made our first ever Christmas Parade so successful. Additionally, we had volunteers from other agencies help us get the bicycles ready for deserving children. Also, we want to thank all those individuals and organizations that donated funds to make sure every child who attended the Christmas festivities received a gift. Finally, our thanks to our chamber of commerce and its membership for all the support and the collaboration that took place. *Mil gracias a todos!*

As you will read in this newsletter greater emphasis by the city staff will be placed in an effort to beautify our city. The initiatives we are spelling out can only be successful if we have the cooperation of our citizens, all our citizens! By working together I know we will begin to see a difference.

We continue to see unprecedented growth

Continued on Page 6



Streets, Curbs, & Easements - You will see (or have seen) City staff trimming grass on the street, trimming every curb, sweeping, shoveling, removing dirt, washing and applying Roundup (a weed and grass killer) along the curb. We will continue to apply Roundup this spring to those areas and need your help to keep the easement in front of your home mowed and trimmed. This will change how your home, the homes on your street and the neighborhood look. Please make an effort to do your part and encourage your neighbor to do the same.

Intersection Beautification - The City of Alton has met with Texas Dept. of Transportation (TxDOT) officials to discuss beautifying the intersection of Mile 5 and Conway. The city has committed \$25,000 for this endeavor and we hope to leverage these funds with a matching grant from TxDOT. This will provide aesthetic improvements to our busiest intersection. The hope is to begin to change how we see our community and assure we put our best foot forward to visitors and impress upon them that, “Que Bonito (es) Alton.”

City Manager’s Note, continued from Page 5

in our city, particularly in the residential sector. This will be our “break out” year when we will see more completed commercial development. This bodes well for our city, as both types of growth will increase the revenues and benefits for our community. In September 2007 the Texas Department of Transportation will expand Mile 5 Road (from La Homa to Conway) which signals further economic development in our city.

Finally, I want to let every citizen in our great city know that our staff will continue to strive to be helpful in solving your concerns. I have made customer service our number one priority within city hall. The staff will continue to receive training to make sure we meet the needs of our citizens. Feel free to come to city hall anytime if you need assistance in resolving a problem or reporting a concern. Nothing makes me more proud than to hear a citizen make a comment about how nicely they were treated by city staff. My promise to you is that we will continue to try our very best.

Wishing you a prosperous new year! Hilario Rincones, Alton City Manager

LIST OF VOLUNTEERS & DONORS

who made the *Spirit of Christmas* come alive!

Universal Exotic Stone Factory
Avalon Apartments
Langley & Bannack
Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson
El Chango Wango
Commissioner Arturo Galvan
HL Projects
Osama B. Nahas MD
Escalera Wecker
Mission Towing
ABC Waste Collection
Contracting Solution
American Financial Bureau (Weslaco)
Raul Hernandez CPA
Mayor Salvador Vela
Commissioner Ricardo Garza
Oxford & Gonzalez
AGADC
Javier Hinojosa Engineering

Law Office of Thomas Rayfield
McAllen Investment Partners LTD.
Papos Towing
A Plus Towing
Alexia Financial
Pro Medic EMS
Johnson Brothers Construction
Lone Star National Bank
Alan Rios
Joe Guajardo
Ashley Garcia
Claire de la Fuente
Petra Aguilar
Ana Karen Castaneda
Margarita Osorio
Blanca Regalado
Martha Corona

Virginia Rios
Yahaira Ochoa
Olga Garcia
Lucy Gutierrez
Ma. Guadalupe Regalado
Annabell Rios
Enedina Ortiz
Guadalupe Morales
Marina Trevino
Lemon Fletcher
Dominique Regalado
Margarita Osorio
Bertha Regalado
Eloina Ramirez
Edna Garcia
Ralph Tapia
Magdalena Ramirez

Amparo Gomez
Anita Gutierrez
Raquel Tello
Polly Calderon
Alejandra Cuellar
Joe Trevino
Roxana Tello
Tanya Gaytan
Vianney Reyna
Melanie Rojas
Isai Sanchez
Lili Sanchez
Mario Luna
Armando Lopez
Rosie Gomez
Nora Flores
Griselda Cano
Faustina Vara

Last but not least, we thank the City of Alton Citizens who showed up with their families, friends, and neighbors to partake in the festivities. We cannot wait until next year’s parade!

What is your Department’s greatest challenge?

The Department’s greatest challenges are having to deal with the growth of the city and the lack of resources available to us (manpower & equipment), an increase in criminal related incidents, and traffic related issues. Our last challenge is to get residents involved to be more aware of their surroundings, caring for each other’s neighbors and reporting suspicious activity immediately as it happens.

What do you believe is the single most important crime prevention strategy the Police Department can implement?

The single most important crime prevention strategy would have to be a close relationship with the public, open communication and working together with the community to maintain a safe environment for all citizens.

What do you feel residents can do to help prevent crime?

Residents can get to know their neighbors and become more aware of their surroundings as well as what is happening around their areas by becoming involved with neighborhood watch programs.